08/04/2020

Living the Church in the Home Today

International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care

Pemptousia, Orthodoxia News Agency stress need to unite our voices, strengthen presence of Orthodox world amid pandemic

The editors and staff of both the online magazine Pemptousia, which focuses on Orthodoxy, scholarly research and culture, as well as the Orthodoxia News Agency have become aware of the crucial need for all of us to unite our voices and to strengthen the presence of the Orthodox world, especially now amid this ominous pandemic.

Moreover, the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care is participating, along with its members, associates, researchers, lecturers and clerics, in this initiative with Pemptousia and the Orthodoxia News Agency.

Today we present an article by Fr. Bassam Nassif, Member of the Association Board of the International Association of Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care (DMOPC)

Living the Church in the Home Today

Nowadays, Christians are going through difficult times due to the pandemic, which is preventing them from going to church and actively participating in the daily rich liturgical life of the Great Lent.

We are on the threshold of Holy Week. Is it enough to listen to the prayers broadcasted by the social media, such as Facebook? How do we truly experience

these prayers for our lives, since today we are denied for health reasons to go to church?

In the days of adversity, persecution, and epidemic, and in times of prosperity, health and peace, the voice of St. John Chrysostom addressing the Christians of his era resounded as follows: “Let your house be a church!” (Homily on Acts 26, 3.4). How can our house be a church, an ecclesia domestica? What did Chrysostom mean? How can we live the church in the home?

There is no one, single and general recipe for all families about how to implement this. Every house has its uniqueness in terms of place, space, and the number of its inhabitants… But there are broad guidelines that make the house a domestic church. If we follow them, we will experience the depths and heights of Christianity, or the beauty, joy, and simplicity of Christian life. What are these guidelines?

Before, we must re-affirm that the goal of our Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit and live “in Christ.” For example, the goal of our children’s upbringing is not limited to making them “morally” good people in society: polite, articulate, and well-educated. Our goal as Christian parents is to prepare them to grow in holiness, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and abide by the love of God and the love of neighbor. We also remember that the Church is not limited to the stone building, but rather the Church is the Body of Christ, and we are members of this Body. This is why the Christian family members form at home a “little church.” Now, where do we begin in our endeavor to establish the church in the home?

First, s**ince Christian life revolves around prayer, the home is a place where we learn prayer.** I still have impressed in my childhood memories the scene of my grandmother praying the morning and evening prayers and the psalms by heart, while standing in front of the icon that my grandfather brought from his pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher as a blessing for his family. Therefore, we begin our endeavor by allocating a place or a table for prayer in the house, on which we display the icons of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, the patron saints of the family members, our parish patron saint, and other icons. The father, mother and children work together in arranging this family place and decorating it. This table or icon corner becomes the home altar in front of which we, together as a family, stand and pray to God. When we pray together, the Lord Himself is actually present! How is that? The Lord Himself affirms: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mat. 18:20). When we stand to pray, and together call on the Holy Spirit to “come and abide in us,” the Lord Jesus comes and blesses us, and the power of the Divine grace overwhelms us and blesses not just our home and family, but also our

neighborhood, town, and even our country and the whole world. Nowadays, we need to pray more for all those victims of the pandemic and all the paramedic teams and officials.

Second, **what prayers do we need to say when we stand together? If we consider for example the Holy Week services, we know that they are available not just in printed books,** but also digitally, which makes it very easy for us to use. Anyway, there isn't a single recipe of prayer rule for all families. The quality is the basis, which means allowing the children to participate earnestly in offering prayers, making prostrations, and reading passages from the Scripture. The father leads, the mother coordinates, and the children assist. We light a candle before the icons, and burn fragrant incense as a sign of our love for, and devotion to, the Lord and His saints. However, it is inevitable to consult our parish priest for the passages that we need to read from the liturgical books or the hymns we may chant. The most important thing to remember as parents is not to impose on our children to participate and force them to pray, but rather set ourselves as examples for them to imitate. Slowly, children will begin to imitate their parents. Also, the parents can discuss the subject of prayer during their daily exchange, offering persuasive arguments. This requires patience, much like any other subject in education. Furthermore, the reading of the saints' lives for children can help them understand the importance of prayer in their personal life, and encourage them to be shining stars in the Lord's Kingdom.

Third, **when do we pray?** It is necessary to consecrate a specific time during the day devoted to prayer, a time chosen by the family and suitable for all its members. There is no doubt that choosing a time to pray suitable for everyone is not easy. However, the Church's experience reveals an important fact about how a Christian ought to spend his or her day. Our prayer time help us discover that we need to "structure" the works of the day, and have a "healthy rhythm" in our daily life. This means that everyone ought to adhere to the daily schedule set for prayer, just as we make time to gather around the table for a family meal, or to watch the scheduled favorite TV program. Also, when the time for prayer is set, we need to abandon temporarily all worldly cares, stop watching TV, or handling our mobile messages, in order to concentrate fully on prayer, since the majestic King of all is present.

Fourth, **we learn at home to pray without ceasing**. How? When the father faces an unresolved issue at work, he turns to the Lord's icon, thanking Him, and begging for help: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner." And when the mother is tired of the household chores, and from homeschooling her children, she

turns to the Sweet Virgin’s icon, asking for inspiration and grace, and sighing: “O Tender Mother of the Most-High God, help me!”

Fifth, **prayer goes hand in hand with action.** One needs to practice the faith, turning from selfishness to self-giving, and daily repent. Each family member is called to have some moments of stillness during the day, in which one “comes to oneself” (Luke 11:17). In doing so, one puts away all anger or hidden grudges, especially when one falls into a disagreement with his or her spouse, children, or siblings. By examining our thoughts, we make peace with ourselves, and propagate a peaceful atmosphere in the home. St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia warns of the daily or weekly rivalries between the husband and wife, and the heated arguments that occur in front of their children. While resolving daily differences and being keen on not making these differences become conflicts, parents need to refer to their spiritual father or parish priest, in addition to having personal prayer and self-examination. This labor is one of the most important spiritual lessons for children. It is living the Gospel, which the children see and hear live! The children absorb the Christian Gospel through seeing how their parents are dealing with each other in a Christian way, possessing the spirit of humility and the attitude of forgiveness. In this manner, the scent of joy spreads in every corner of the house. All this is a preparation for our unity in Christ, which occurs through the Holy Eucharist that we partake in the Divine Liturgy.

In this way, we grow together in the love of Christ, and we build a church in the home that glorifies God.

BIOGRAPHY



Fr. Bassam Nassif is a parish priest in the Antiochian Orthodox Church. He is also the Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology and Marital Counseling at the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand and the Faculty of Humanities, Notre Dame University, Louaizé, Lebanon. Fr. Bassam has been teaching for the last ten years pastoral, social and family care in both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Also, he is the currently the coordinator of the Kalima Online Theology program of the Institute of Theology and the supervisor of the Field Education program for the Bachelor of Theology students in Balamand. He serves on several academic and administrative committees in the University of Balamand. His doctoral dissertation focused on the pastoral care of the family in a changing postmodern world. Thus, Fr. Nassif aims to deal with contemporary challenges facing the Orthodox Church. As a speaker in several international conferences and forums in America and Europe, Rev. Dr. Nassif is concerned with integrating the pastoral theology of the Orthodox Church with the research and experience of the human sciences, leading to the formation of a therapeutic

pastoral care approach. Building on scientific research and on the rich legacy of the Church Fathers, he endeavors to offer a modern approach to pastoral care leading to the righteousness of modern man.

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